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Settling In to Genre: The Social Action of Emotion in Shaping Genres



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Abstract: Rhetorical Genre Studies has noted the importance of emotion to the study of genre, focusing on how writers' attitudes and dispositions influence their perception of a genre. To continue to validate emotions as part of the experience of creating and shaping genres, this study traces the emotional valences of one writer, "Jocelyn," in shaping the genre of a sorority recruitment video, a genre of media used in sororities nationwide to showcase the sorority in a desirable way. Analyzing an interview with Jocelyn and coding the images in Jocelyn's video and her model text for their rhetorical function suggests that Jocelyn replicated the rhetorical aims of her model text but selected certain images that were emotionally resonant for her and her group. Jocelyn is inspired to shape the genre to the extent that she finds the existing genre emotionally inadequate and emotionally inauthentic to represent her group. Jocelyn's video "remakes" herself and her friends as "sorority girls," but also "remakes" the sorority in a way that's both palatable and emotionally authentic for her. I suggest the metaphor of "settling in" to genre to represent the embodied feedback loop writers use when they take up a new genre and unpack this metaphor for explaining the role of emotion in genre pedagogy.

Carolyn Miller's redefinition of genre as "social action" in 1984 shifted the focus of genre studies from textual features to the *actions* that genres help construct, intervene in, respond to, and act upon. By shifting the focus of genre studies from describing features to identifying actions, rhetorical genre studies (RGS) effectively showed the dynamic social and rhetorical functions of genres. The interdisciplinary study of emotion has undergone a comparable social turn. Emotions used to be understood as personally experienced and primarily the concern of psychologists, until the late 1980s when scholars from sociology, education, anthropology, history, women's studies, and rhetoric began to theorize emotions as part of a "sociocultural system" (Sommers 26). To forward this idea, scholars in this interdisciplinary field of critical emotion studies have explored how emotions are socially and culturally mediated practices. More recently, scholars have legitimated emotion as a category of analysis in studying how emotion attaches to ideas, beliefs, people, and structures (Micciche *Doing*), how emotion moves through discourse (Jacobs and Micciche), how emotion animates racial literacy (Trainor, Winans), and how emotion relates to critical thinking (Chandler).

RGS has noted the importance of emotion to the study of genre, focusing on how writers' attitudes and dispositions influence their perception of a genre. Charles Bazerman notes that orienting oneself toward a genre means taking on "the mood, attitude, and actional possibilities of that place" (13). Gillian Fuller and Alison Lee also note that orienting oneself toward a genre requires "a joint agreement to perform certain positionalities within a certain regime" (215). For academic writing, Fuller and Lee contend, emotions such as pleasure, desire, and anxiety tend to end up as "excess" to the "institutional formalities" of genre (209). Research has also found that the accumulated emotional experience of educational systems makes students reluctant to reshape genres of academic writing (Russell *Re-thinking*; Spinuzzi *Psuedotransactionality*; Wardle *Mutt Genres*). Drawing attention to this role of desire and motivation, David Russell writes that "In most courses, [students] are not motivated by a desire for further involvement in the discipline to the extent they could appropriate its object/motive, or choose it as a life direction" (*Re-thinking* 540-41). The lethargy of institutionalized educational experiences, it seems, means that students replicate forms and patterns of response that have worked for them in the past. Because genres infer subjectivities and positionalities for readers and writers, Dylan Dryer notes that that "Genres do not negate human agency, of course, but it would be unwise to underestimate the degree to which institutionally entrenched

genres reproduce themselves by reshaping the readers and writers who are required to take them up" (506). Genres of academic writing may *feel* as though they are beyond students' control, and students may resist or feel uncomfortable about the identities inferred in a given genre, which in turn will affect their willingness to shape or adapt a genre. Clark and Hernandez's study of students who completed a course entirely focused on metacognitive understanding of genre found that students clung to the five-paragraph essay "with tenacity" because as novice writers, they "have a great need for form" and are reluctant to change or shape academic genres that feel safe and familiar to them (74). This is not just a phenomenon of student writers; Catherine F. Schryer's study of letter writers for an insurance company also demonstrated that when a template existed, employees were more likely than not to use it. Schryer writes, "From [the employees'] perspective, the existence of the template made their lives easier, as they did not have to make any decisions regarding form" (87).

Dryer suggests engaging students in an emotional analysis to make genre conventions more available: "What, specifically, are the conventions that you find most frustrating?" "What are these feelings like?" "What are they linked to?" "What might the ways you feel positioned by this text say about the power relations it reflects and projects?" (525). With this exception, however, emotion has mostly been elided from pedagogical discussion of genre. In RGS, Aviva Freedman argues that students slowly develop a "felt sense" of a genre based on instructor and peer feedback, class discussion, and course readings, but despite using the word "felt," does not mention emotion. Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff review three genre awareness pedagogies based on RGS; not a single one asks students to consider a relationship of genres and emotion (192-200).

We know that the emotions writers feel about genres—safety, ease, comfort—lead them to cling to certain forms and conventions of genres. We also know that emotions of certain social contexts—lethargic or disempowering school settings, or workplaces where writers value efficiency—affect writers' approaches to writing tasks within these contexts. But to continue to validate emotions as part of the experience of creating and shaping genres, we need to describe the social actions of emotions as writers take up genres.^[1] Without this description, we risk leaving emotion in the realm of the private and personally experienced, thus ignoring its very real rhetorical functions. To challenge the view that emotion "deals in the ephemeral, the elusive, and ultimately the unnamable—in other words, the impractical aspects of discourse," Laura Micciche advocates "a discourse about writing that accounts for the 'mystery' presence of sensation and feeling in the rhetoric, practice, and nature of writing" (Trouble 266-67). Our genre pedagogy would benefit from a means of understanding the role of emotion for writers shaping genres. Following many feminist scholars, Shari Stenberg argues, "[W]e are in need of particular accounts of how emotion can become a source of knowledge in pedagogical sites" (362). But despite the works noted above, emotion continues to be elided from pedagogical discussions, perhaps because, as Stenberg notes, emotion is seen as antagonistic to the valorized "rational, efficient, 'balanced' (white male) student" (350). As a case in point, even the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, a document specifically geared toward a holistic view of learning, privileges rational thinking over empathy, sympathy, and sensitivity (Severino).

For the sake of both methodology and pedagogy, critical emotion studies can be productively combined with RGS to theorize how writers perceive the emotions related to a genre, how they deploy emotion in creating and shaping genres, and how they understand emotion as one of the social actions of genre.^[2] Specifically, the concept of the "stickiness" of emotions meshes well with theorizations of the emergence of genre. Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed argues that emotions emerge as a result of contacts between actors and objects, which become "sticky, or saturated" with emotion from these encounters (11). For example, a student listens to a teacher explain a research paper assignment and feels anxious about doing well on the assignment. The emotion of anxiety, according to Ahmed, does not reside solely in the student, but rather as a mediated result of *contact* between the student and the assignment, which is based on the students' history with this genre, as well as her past contacts with, among other things, writing assignments, teachers, and the educational system. This contact ends in "(re)actions or relations of 'towardness' or 'awayness' in relation to such objects" (8). As a *result* of the contact, the student feels anxious, and the assignment becomes stressful (these emotions do not pre-exist nor constitute either entity). Picking up Ahmed's definition in composition studies, Laura Micciche writes that the concept of stickiness explains emotion as "dynamic and relational, taking form through collisions of contact between people as well as between people and the objects, narratives, beliefs, and so forth that we encounter in the world" (*Doing* 28). As emotions emerge in these "collisions of contact," so too do genres; Aviva Freedman notes that RGS studies genres in the "moment of coming-into-being," meaning the moment the genre acts upon a "socially interpreted/constructed situation-type" (118). A writer approaches a genre with all her past histories of contact with that genre, which includes emotions that have emerged from this contact. As such, emotions are one layer of what Paul Prior and Jody Shipka call the "chronotopic lamination" of literate activity, referring to the "fluid chains of places, times, people, and artifacts that come to be tied together in trajectories of literate action" (181). As part of the chronotopic lamination of genres, emotions are a factor in determining how a writer understands the situation from which the genre emerges and the agency she feels in altering the genre. Emotions are also one of the social actions of genre that writers consider as they take up a genre.

This study traces the emotional valences of a writer new to an organization and its genres to see how emotions influenced her approach to one specific genre as well as how she understood emotion as part of the genre's reception by an audience. I studied the process of one writer, "Jocelyn,"^[3] in taking up the genre of a sorority recruitment video. Following Paul Prior and Rebecca Bilbro, I theorize the process of entering a sorority as a process of "enculturation." Rejecting the idea that becoming a part of a new culture involves the "one-way transmission of relatively stable cultural knowledge" (20), Prior and Bilbro are more interested in academic enculturation as "remaking" both people and disciplines (22).^[4] Ideally, Prior and Bilbro contend:

Our sense is that the broadest framework for understanding academic enculturation is one that sees it as situated, historical, evolving dialogic activity, as sites where students, professionals, and societies are being remade in practice. In the fullest sense of the term, enculturation not only includes specific discursive forms but also practices that migrate and are recontextualized across settings, practices that implicate ideologies and changes in participant identities. (30)

This theorization of the sorority, along with theories of emotion as socially constructed, inform the methodology I use in this essay for studying the sorority's practices. I begin by situating the group as a "new" sorority, colliding with practices and discursive forms created by existing chapters on other campuses. Because emotion is part of the sorority women's rhetorical positioning, I discuss patterns in the emotions with which the women approached the sorority and trace the way emotions "move, stick, and slide" (Ahmed 14) through one member's trajectory of participation in the sorority, from her family-related reasons for not joining, to her friends convincing her to join, to her leadership position of recruiting new members to the sorority. In this position, Jocelyn creates a sorority recruitment video, a genre of media used in sororities nationwide to showcase the sorority in a desirable way: fun, attractive women who participate in campus events. Because practices "migrate and are recontextualized across settings" (Prior and Bilbro 30), I interviewed Jocelyn to understand her composing process of the video. To make transparent the way Jocelyn altered her model text, I developed a coding scheme for the rhetorical function of each image in both videos using Sonja Foss' schema for evaluating visual imagery. Using Peter Smagorinsky's method of "collaborative coding," I coded these images with an undergraduate researcher, Carolyn German, for their rhetorical function. The data suggests that Jocelyn replicated the rhetorical aims of her model text, but selected certain photos that were emotionally resonant for her and her group. Jocelyn is inspired to shape the genre to the extent that she finds the existing genre *emotionally inadequate* and *emotionally inauthentic* to represent her group. Jocelyn's replication of the aims of the model text "remakes" herself and her friends as "sorority girls," but also "remakes" the sorority in a way that's both palatable and emotionally authentic for her. Extrapolating from Jocelyn's experience, I suggest the metaphor of "settling in" to the genre to represent the biofeedback loop writers use when they take up a new genre. My conclusion unpacks this metaphor for explaining the role of emotion in genre pedagogy.

The Possibility of Genre Change in a "New" Social Sorority

Most sororities are affiliated with a national or international organization. This umbrella organization often has full-time staff who oversee campus chapters, organize national events for undergraduate members and alumnae, travel to and assist chapters who are struggling (perhaps because of behavioral issues or declining participation), and help build and strengthen new chapters. When I came to campus in the fall of 2012, this particular sorority, "Beta Zeta," had just opened a new chapter on campus, though it was affiliated with a strong national organization. When I asked to get involved with a student organization on campus, the student activities office asked me to be their faculty adviser, which the university requires for all registered student organizations, despite the fact that I had never been in a sorority and didn't know very much about sororities. As such, I spent a lot of time observing and listening rather than participating, which enabled me to witness the dynamics unfold between the established, historically rooted national organization and the recently opened, slowly burgeoning local chapter.

The national organization sets forth practices, standards, and guidelines for the functioning of individual chapters, and upholds the traditions, rituals, symbols, and philanthropic interests of the sorority "brand."^[5] This conservatism inherent to sororities has effects comparable to the historical rootedness of academic genres or genres of professional writing: it is unlikely that a newcomer would immediately change those genres. Victoria Marro, an undergraduate student and member of the Chi Omega sorority, notes that becoming a new member of a sorority requires learning genres already present within the activity system. In an activity system analysis of her sorority, Marro writes, "as a new member, things such as the GIN system [the online communication management system] and other genres used by the chapter can be quite confusing, and generally require observation before using them regularly" (31). Like students entering the genres of academic writing (Russell Writing; Spinuzzi Pseudotransactionality; Wardle), and like workers entering the genres of professional writing (Dias and Paré), when taking on the written genres of the sorority, it's likely that a new member would spend a significant amount

of time “observing,” learning, and then replicating existing written forms, rather than making substantial changes right away. A new member of a “new” chapter is doubly likely to replicate the existing genres of the sorority instead of changing or adapting the genre.

Unless, that is, something happens to question the inevitability of genres. The genres of writing of this particular sorority are interesting to scholars of genre because, as Anthony Paré writes, one of the conditions under which the taken-for-granted nature of genres is “exposed” is “when newcomers first begin to participate in a genre and find it ‘unnatural’ or counter to their own discourse habits and aims” (61). While the international chapter of a sorority sets standards for sorority practices, local chapters take up these practices in varied ways to accommodate for the needs of their local campus culture and the interests of the women who join. As a result, the opening of a “new” chapter of an “existing” sorority offered an opportunity for the “exposure” of taken-for-granted genres, particularly since many of the women who joined initially found sororities distasteful and contradictory to their understanding of themselves.

I captured some of this exposure of genres while conducting a year-long ethnographic study of this sorority. Between September 2012 and May 2013, my graduate assistant and I interviewed twenty-two founding members of the sorority. In our interviews, we asked the women to narrate their paths of participation into the sorority, describing and explaining their motivations for participation. Of the twenty-two women we interviewed, twelve went through the formal recruitment process of the campus sororities. Of these twelve, six didn’t find a group in which they felt like they fit in, five found the process of recruitment superficial or fake, and one didn’t like the stigmas or reputations surrounding the sororities. These twelve women met with members of the international board along with local alumnae, who promised them significant leadership pertaining to the direction of the sorority and persuaded them to join. The remaining ten of the twenty-two women never went through recruitment at all, two because of family members who had negative ideas about sororities, seven who didn’t like the reputations and stigmas of the existing sororities, and one who wasn’t happy at the university at all and didn’t want to get further involved. Existing members recruited these women individually in the sorority’s first year, also promising them leadership in the sorority’s first year. All of this is to say that the women began their sorority experience with ambivalence and a good amount of skepticism about their sorority participation. They also, however, expressed excitement about being part of something new and the opportunity to shape the direction of the organization, making the chapter a promising site to study the emotions involved in genre uptake and change. Eleven members, including Jocelyn, said they were specifically excited about leadership opportunities in the sorority.

As part of my ethnographic research, I collected 73 written artifacts over the course of the year, anticipating that I would find examples of newcomers questioning the taken-for-granted genres of the sorority. I classified these documents into three categories according to their function. The first category, consisting of 27 documents, had the primary function of “organizing and managing the group.” These documents were created or adapted with the primary purpose of organizing and managing the sorority’s activities, including calendars, budgets, handouts with announcements, and sign-up sheets. The second category, consisting of 34 documents, was “teaching/learning conventions,” and consisted of documents that assisted in instructing sorority members in how to act or what to do in certain situations. This included PowerPoints teaching members the sorority’s songs and chants, the policy for appropriate behavior at sorority functions, and the new members’ handbook. In these first two categories, the women were often replicating existing genres or making minor changes to existing forms. The chapter had two full-time advisers trained by the international chapter of the sorority and a seven-member alumnae advisory board. The full-time advisers traveled between chapters, and so had access to a wide variety of examples and resources to share with the women, mostly in electronic format for the women to adapt as they saw fit. These advisers offered them examples of most of the texts in these first two categories.

The third category, consisting of 13 texts, had the purpose of “developing an image.” I placed into this category texts that were directed to represent the sorority to a wider audience: the tri-annual newsletter sent home to members’ parents, an application for the all-Greek awards, and the text I will study here, the video made to recruit new women to the sorority. This was certainly the highest-stakes category in terms of developing the sorority’s “brand.” While the documents in the first two categories (like an event planning form) could simply be changed with different factual information, the texts that aimed to develop an image challenged the women to think about how they wanted to develop their sorority “brand.” What were they offering to campus women that no other sorority offered? What was special or unique about them? Adding to this challenge was the fact that they had to develop this brand via a negotiation of the values of the national chapter, the local campus culture, other sororities, and the members themselves. This category of texts was fewest in number, likely because the texts took a lot of time to compose. Because they were high-stakes, they were composed thoughtfully and collaboratively. The women often created these projects in committees and posted them on the sorority’s online project management system, asking other members and advisers for feedback, and revising them accordingly. While members still sometimes worked from model texts given to them by advisers, just changing dates and other factual information was not enough

because these texts had to construct the unique character of their chapter.

This category of texts interested me most because I suspected that there would be a connection between the women's desire to shape the sorority and their participation in the genres of writing that shaped the image of the organization. Because the women entered the sorority with negative associations with sororities in general, I wanted to know how these emotions would collide with their taking up of genres of writing used consistently in sororities nationwide. How would their desire to shape and change the sorority manifest in the way they took up these existing genres?

Jocelyn Takes Up the Genre of Recruitment Videos

To formulate a response to these questions, I chose to focus on one writer's entry into the sorority and her understanding of an existing genre of sorority writing. I selected Jocelyn's story to tell here for two reasons. First, her experience was fairly typical of the founding class; she chose not to go through sorority recruitment at all because she thought sororities were too much about status and cliques. Two of the founding members of "Beta Zeta" took Jocelyn to lunch a few months after the sorority opened the chapter and gave her the sense that this chapter could be different:

Jocelyn: Kristine was talking about all the leadership opportunities that could come from it. They built a new high school in my town and my class was the first graduating class so we started everything.

I started the student council, I got the executive board together and we ran the functions so I was like okay, I think I could actually help a sorority, which is just starting. I worked with an organization that needed a lot of help, an entire school that needed a lot of help. I never had experience with sorority life but I thought I could help out so I was really excited about that when Kristine told me about that. . . I was like if I don't take this now, I would lose all these opportunities of starting this organization. I stayed up until 2 a.m. researching Beta Zeta International cause I wanted to know as much as I can, like the symbols and the philanthropy to make sure it was something I really related to and liked and I did.

Interviewer: Had you heard about Beta Zeta on campus?

Jocelyn: We didn't have a reputation, so I didn't have to take anything on. We're new, so people ask me a lot of questions and I love that. That's why I liked it because I get to help build what Beta Zeta will be.

Feelings of exclusion had accumulated for Jocelyn as a result of her relative's experience with a sorority at a state school. When her friend Kristine framed the sorority as something "new," positive associations built for Jocelyn—excitement, ambition, and engagement—because she associated it with the experience of starting a student council at her high school. As a result, she was excited about getting on board with the sorority in its nascent stages. By comparing the sorority to a student council and noting its "leadership opportunities," Jocelyn disassociated the sorority from the negative emotions of an elite social club. At the same time, however, Jocelyn didn't completely un-tether herself from the sorority's roots: she conducted research on the sorority and identified herself with its existing values and philanthropy. So when Jocelyn was charged with creating a video to show during the sorority's recruitment process to interest new members in the sorority, I was interested to see how these emotional associations would affect her taking up of the genre of the sorority recruitment video. As Clay Spinuzzi writes, genres are "caught between history and addressivity—between offering the solutions of the past and responding to the exigencies of the present"—and they tend to be "the points at which such binds become visible" (*Tracing* 117). And so this was the second reason I selected to study Jocelyn's experience: it seemed like the recruitment video existed in one of these binds between the way sororities have always recruited and an opportunity to show the uniqueness of a "new" sorority. To get at my larger question of the effect of emotions on the way writers approach genre, I wanted to know: How would Jocelyn negotiate Beta Zeta's existing history and the existing genres of sorority recruitment videos with her desire to "build" what Beta Zeta "will be"?

Allow me to explain some of the social actions of the genre of sorority recruitment videos for readers unfamiliar with sororities. A member elected as Director of Recruitment typically creates the video to be shown on the first day of the 5-7 day recruitment process, designed to introduce potential new members (PNMs) to the culture of sorority life on campus. This video, a 5-minute photomontage set to music, typically shows the events the sorority holds throughout the year. The video is enough of an established genre on campus that it is regulated by the panhellenic council, the campus' umbrella sorority organization. A representative of this council must approve each sorority's video before recruitment begins, and the videos must follow a set of standards. For example, images of

drinking are not allowed, for obvious reasons. Somewhat less obviously, the videos are not allowed to show images of fraternity members because, as Jocelyn told me, the panhellenic council wants to promote the idea that all sorority members socialize with all fraternity members (instead of competition to be seen with the “best” fraternity). This rule, in particular, complicated Jocelyn’s task because one of the sorority’s most successful fundraisers was done in conjunction with a fraternity, and most of the photos from the event showed the women with fraternity members. The conventions and standards created by the panhellenic council, then, solidified some of the genre conventions and added to Jocelyn’s challenge in assembling the video.

Rhetorically, the video serves as an abbreviated version of the sorority experience being promised to new members. I asked my undergraduate researcher, Carolyn German, to explain some of the rhetorical functions of the videos. Carolyn was a transfer student, and so was involved with sorority recruitment and the sorority experience at two different schools, one a large, public institution and one a smaller, private institution. She had served on the executive council of one chapter, and so also had experience in sorority leadership. Based on viewings of these videos on YouTube and from her own experience with sorority recruitment, Carolyn was able to identify “regularities in textual features” and “particular rhetorical moves” exhibited by sorority recruitment videos (Paré and Smart 147). Rhetorically, the videos address some of the anxieties common to prospective sorority members: Will I like these people? Will the sorority be fun and entertaining? Will I fit in and/or will I have to change myself to fit in? To address these concerns, videos tend to show the women having fun and participating in activities together while looking good. The videos also tend to have close-ups of individual members, and show members acting silly or strange in an effort to highlight their individuality. By showing new members what the sorority experience will be like at the moment they are deciding whether or not to join, the sorority recruitment video also represents “the development and stabilization of worldviews” (Spinuzzi *Tracing* 41). In this case, the video portrays a certain view of what sororities are, what sororities do, and the kind of identity and group affiliation the women can expect should they choose to join (which is why they are regulated by the panhellenic council, a group with a vested interest in women’s expectations for the sorority experience). I was concerned that I would make too much of Jocelyn’s choices, and I didn’t want her to feel like she had to make up a reason for any choice. Carolyn and I watched Jocelyn’s video and she helped me develop interview questions (see [Appendix](#)).

In the interview, Jocelyn told me that women in the chapter sent her approximately 450 photos for the video, and she had even more to select from by looking through members’ Facebook profiles. She narrowed these photos down to 133 that actually appeared in the video. Jocelyn told me that she wanted the video to reflect the emotional resonances of the group and to create affective value in her audience:

Jocelyn: I just love the goofy [photos] where, I guess a non-posed picture, a candid, because those are hilarious, those are the ones where you really get to see what we’re like. We’re real people, we don’t stand with our elbows on our hips and a giant grin on, so I liked [the goofy photos]. With the [second] section I ended up doing more of like sitting and smiling or standing and smiling pictures, keeping it goofy and light. And specifically for parties I wanted a lot of movement in the picture so like we’re laughing at each other or dancing or there ones where we’re doing the family stack poses and stuff and then the last little section I wanted to make it more like . . . pictures that you look at and think, “Those girls are happy.” Like you can’t deny, where girls are hugging or like squished together or. . . they all have their arms around each other . . . stuff like that where you can really see love and sisterhood, all those emotions.

Interviewer: What does sisterhood look like in a picture?

Jocelyn: My favorite one is one of Lilly and Kristine and it always comes to my mind. Kristine has her head on [Lilly’s] chest and she’s just kind of snuggled into her and she has this big grin and Lilly’s laughing and they both look extremely happy. Another one is of Jana and Erica and they’re at [a sporting event] together, and they’re just squeezing each other so tight and they have grins where they can’t even keep their eyes open. That’s just how they are. They have that connection with each other and I think that’s really good to show that.

Interviewer: So you weren’t looking for the posed—

Jocelyn: Oh I was so trying to avoid that! I was so trying to avoid the posed hair and makeup, at all costs! . . . The smiles don’t look as genuine in the posed ones.

Jocelyn is hoping that the video will re-create her own affective experience as a member of the sorority (“love and sisterhood,” “goofy and light”) and transfer this affective experience to the viewer. The existing genre, however, is inadequate for doing so because the images of the State University video ring false for Jocelyn. This is in part

because she doesn't know the women, but also in part due to the posed pictures ("I was trying to avoid the posed hair and makeup, at all costs!"), which are contradictory to Jocelyn's view of her own chapter ("We're real people"). For Jocelyn, the existing genre is characterized by physical restraint, while actual sisterhood is represented by a lack of this restraint. When Jocelyn said in the interview that the images in the State University video didn't feel "true" to her, I asked her to describe one specifically. She discussed one image where all the women were wearing heels and put their feet in a circle around the sorority's crest. I have inserted em dashes in the transcript below to show moments in the transcript where Jocelyn struggles with what she wants to say. To be clear, these em dashes are not pauses. Her speech rolls along with her characteristic energy and enthusiasm, but she struggles to articulate her view of the State University women:

[State University has] really, really pretty women who have a super, super strong sisterhood but they're all so like—they go out—they—I don't know. They're like the pretty girls. They look really like—they work hard to be pretty. And so I just didn't think like anybody in our chapter would honestly have like enough even or like have an interest in putting their foot in a circle, like having to get a pedicure, it's just not like a—I just didn't think our chapter members would even be like—they'd kind of be like, "Why are we doing this?" I don't know. We're also pretty sassy so I just didn't really want to get into that but then I think—so I thought it was very cool but it just wasn't going to work for our chapter.

I want to suggest several reasons Jocelyn is struggling to be articulate here. Most apparently, while calling State University "the pretty girls" may be a compliment, noting that the video's primary purpose is to showcase the beauty of the women makes it feel superficial and stereotypical of sororities. Her speech seems to break down as she experiences what Clay Spinuzzi calls a "breakdown," like the moment when a writer finds that a genre is not up to a task, leading her to "reperceive and remanage" genres (*Tracing* 70). Note that Jocelyn does not actually critique the rhetorical function of the State University video to showcase the beauty and material possessions of the women in State University ("I thought it was very cool"). She only predicts that if she were to try to re-create the shot, it would *feel* inappropriate to the chapter members ("Why are we doing this?") and she anticipates complaining and negative attitudes ("We're also pretty sassy"). She takes up the genre of the sorority recruitment video with an emotional motivation to represent the women in her sorority in a way that feels right to her own previous experience in the sorority and in a way that will feel right to the women represented in the video. Asking the women in her chapter to pose in a way that merely replicates the existing genre, however successful it may have been for State University, will not be emotionally appropriate for Jocelyn or well received by the sorority members.

Jocelyn solicited feedback about her genre intervention from her peers because she understood the emotions of the video had to feel true to others as well:

Jocelyn: As I showed it to more members I was able to tweak it. By the end of the process Frieda [the other director of recruitment] and I hadn't seen it in a long time, we just wanted to make sure everything was working in the end, so we watched it [again] and at the end we were both smiling and looking at the screen and she was like, "Every time I watch that it makes me want to go and do something good. You just feel good, you want to do something good, you want to go and be with your chapter." . . . From the responses I got from the new member surveys, they said that they could tell that, too. They also wanted to be a part of it. . . You feel great about what you're a part of and I feel like even on the outside or as a girl watching the video who, it might be her first experience ever with Greek life, she could feel that, too, and that's important.

Jocelyn experiences joy from the video from watching it with Frieda ("we were both smiling") in a shared moment and she gauges the success of the video based on the degree to which she is able to replicate that emotional experience for the prospective members of the sorority ("she [the new member] could feel that, too, and that's important").

Analyzing Jocelyn's Genre Modifications

With a sense of how emotion informed Jocelyn's approach to the video, I next wanted to study the actual modifications she made to the video. To do so, Carolyn and I developed a scheme for the images in the video to look at similarities and differences in the way each achieved their rhetorical functions and to see the frequency with which the images for each function was used. Carolyn and I used the Dedoose qualitative analysis software to segment each individual image in both videos and apply a code to it.

Our analysis of the visual images of the videos followed Sonja Foss' scheme for evaluating visual imagery:

- 1. What is the function of this image?
- 2. How well is that function communicated via the visual elements?
- 3. What is the legitimacy or soundness of that function, “determined by the implications and consequences of the function” (217)?

To determine the function of the images, we created a coding scheme to code each image in each video based on what we called its “main promise.” Sorority videos make a promise to the viewer about the kind of experience the viewer will have if she chooses to participate in the sorority. So, while many photos served many functions, we attempted to settle on one primary function for each image in the video. As rhetorical critics, we focused on how we would experience the video as first-year college students: interested in but also wary of sorority life. As Valerie Peterson writes, “The task of critics of visual rhetoric is to discover how visual elements communicate identity, meaning, and culture to the people who see and make sense of them” (27). This step of the research would have been supplemented by showing the videos to first-year college students, although Carolyn and I felt that based on our combined experience, we could fairly approximate how these videos would be received.

Because of the similar functions of both videos—to recruit women to the sorority—Carolyn and I created a coding scheme that could apply to both videos, though we understood that the images in the videos might carry out these functions in different ways. Carolyn created the first draft of the coding scheme using grounded theory (Charmaz), an analytical method that creates theories “grounded” in the data through a recursive process between reading data and close analysis. Using grounded theory, the researcher works in a process of “constant comparative analysis” moving back and forth between data and theory development (Birks and Mills 11). To keep our coding scheme close to the data, we pulled language from Jocelyn’s interview (“connection” and “fun”) as well as language that would be familiar to an audience of first-year college students at this university (“involvement” and “individuality”). We added a fifth category, “beauty,” for images that had what Jocelyn called the “posed hair and makeup” and/or featured the women standing “with our elbows on our hips and a giant grin on.” Our first impulse was to code for the emotion of each image, but we often found that several emotions were working together to achieve a rhetorical function, and we wanted to keep our focus on these functions as the social actions of the genre. The chart itself elaborates on these emotions and their connection to rhetorical function.

To code the images, we used a method Peter Smagorinsky calls “collaborative coding,” developed from and greatly influenced by Vygotsky’s work on the social construction of language (401). Rather than creating a coding scheme and handing it to another coder to code independently, Smagorinsky works with a doctoral student to “discuss each data segment before agreeing on how to bracket and code it,” reaching agreement “through collaborative discussion” (401). Smagorinsky thinks that the “generative nature of the collaborative approach [is] as likely to produce an insightful reading of the data because each decision is the result of a serious and thoughtful exchange about what to call each and every data segment” (402). Carolyn and I discussed every image in each video to come to a consensus on its primary function, balancing our complementary expertise in sororities. We refined our coding scheme as we went along, and went back and re-coded segments for consistency. My university’s IRB would not permit me to publish photos or videos of the women at my university or State University, so I asked my undergraduate research assistants to re-enact images from both videos in order to offer examples to represent the codes. Table 1 includes the images and the codes with discussion of how and why we interpreted each image and assigned it a function. Table 1 also compares two images from different videos with the same function, in line with Foss’ injunction that an image be compared not to an ideal but to “other images with the same or a similar function in an effort to highlight available options in communicating such a function” (217). Carolyn and I selected images for the table that we felt were representative of the kinds of images used in the videos.

Table 1. Codes and Example Images.

Function of Image	Example from State University video	Example from Jocelyn’s video
Connection Images promise a friend group by showing friendship, camaraderie, love,		

sisterhood,
warmth,
affection.

Images
demonstrate a
desirable
group
dynamic.



In the video, the woman in white leans over to hug her friend in a quick movement, lending the scene a feeling of both spontaneity and silliness. This image demonstrates “connection” because the woman in white is leaning into the personal space of the woman in purple. But the woman in purple maintains her personal space by keeping an arm close to her body, leaning away, and continuing to angle her body outward to the camera, making the image less warm and intimate.

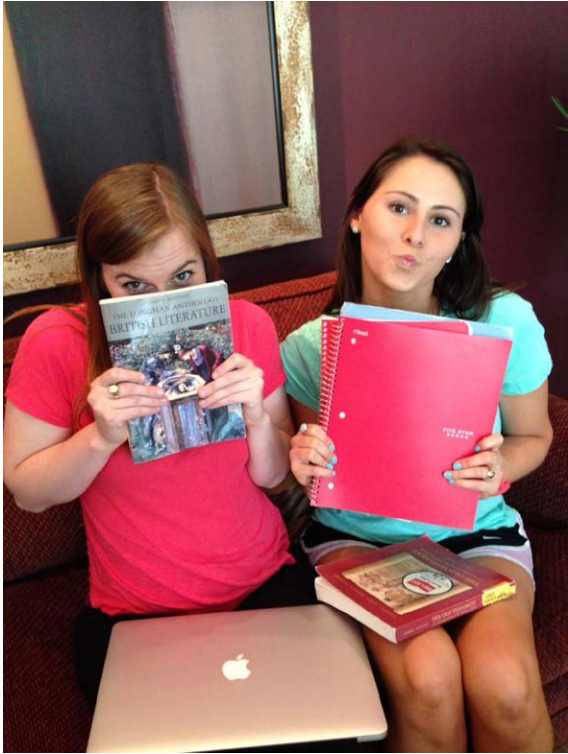


This image also shows a disregard for personal space as the woman in gray woman pulls the woman in blue inward, and the women in blue rests into her. Because the women rest into each other, the “connection” in this shot feels more relaxed and laid-back. As such, this image feels restful and peaceful. The women’s casual dress—contrasted with the more glamorous style of the State University shot—also lends the image a feeling of comfort and relaxation.

Involvement

Images
promise that
members will
receive a
desirable
experience as
a result of
being involved
in the sorority.





Images
promise that
the sorority is
a group that
the viewer will
want to be
involved in.





The shot previous to this has a group of women exclaiming, “Study buddies!” While the shot ostensibly shows the group’s value of academics as a form of involvement, it also has a silliness to it in the “kissy-face” and the woman’s face peeking out from behind the textbook. Silliness and fun underlie the representation of the group’s activities, promising that even studying is fun if you join the sorority.



This image shows the women revealing to their chapter how much money they raised at their annual philanthropic gala. The image comes after a long line of images of the women at the gala, almost all of which were coded “beauty.” As such, the image’s placement emphasizes the *outcome* and *product* of the women’s involvement, instead of just promising that the form of involvement is fun. The image adds a level of tangibility and purpose to the women’s philanthropic work.

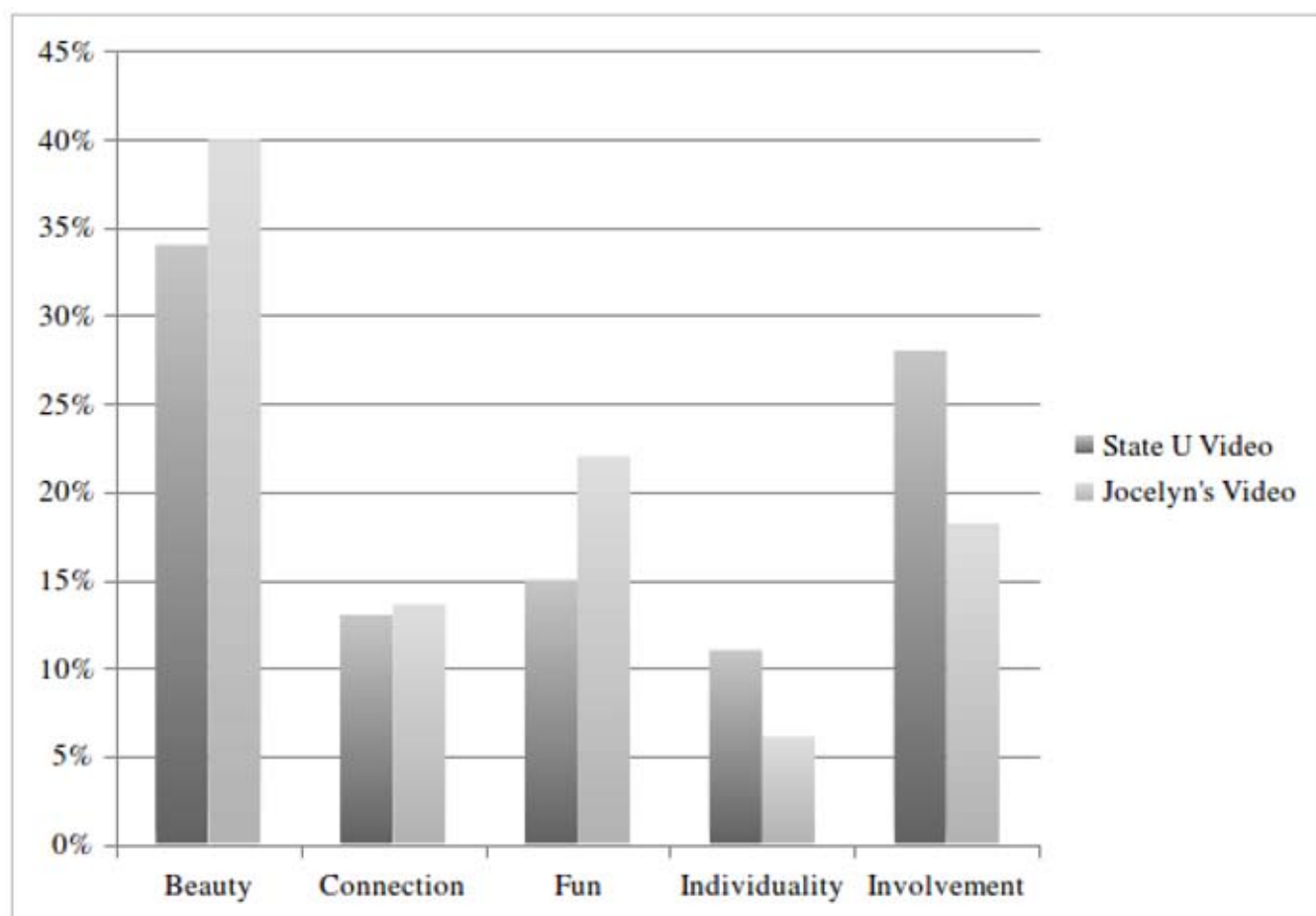
<p>Fun</p> <p>Images promise that being a member of the sorority will be fun.</p> <p>Images show the girls' ability to goof around and laugh at themselves.</p>	 <p>This image demonstrates fun by showing the women "goofing around." Nonetheless, the image still feels staged because the women are still "posing," self-consciously trying to look "silly" for the camera. (Carolyn noted that the image feels like someone said, "Be goofy!" and this is what happened.) The image still emphasizes fashion and style as the women are well-groomed and wear matching shirts and pants.</p>	 <p>This "fun" image has a more spontaneous and silly feeling, demonstrating the women's ability to laugh at themselves. It is less posed because it occurs in a single moment of the women acting silly and so cannot be re-created or re-taken, making it feel candid and unexpected. The women's informal attire adds to the relaxed vibe.</p>
<p>Beauty</p> <p>Promises that the sorority has physically attractive and stylish members.</p> <p>Primary occasion for the image is that members have put effort into their appearance and want to capture it.</p>	 <p>The women in this image are dressed similarly and their hair is styled similarly. While they hold on to each other, their energy is directed outward toward the camera. (Carolyn noted that for images like these, unlike the "fun" images, the photos were often re-taken and examined until everyone in the photo was happy with the way the image looked.)</p>	 <p>This beauty image serves a similar function, though the fashion, styling, and makeup are simpler and less elaborate.</p>
<p>Individuality</p> <p>Promises that members will be able to be a part of the group and retain an individual</p>		

<p>identity-</p> <p>Members are often posing in a unusual or striking manner.</p>	 <p>This image shows "individuality" because the woman is dancing by herself. Though she is moving, the image feels "posed" because she is clearly performing for a camera. Her "individuality" is performed in a way that entertains her audience.</p>	 <p>In this image, the woman demonstrates her individuality by being alone. There is a relaxation to this image, as though she can be comfortable just being herself in nature. This image displays more self-confidence in that she doesn't feel the need to "perform" her individuality or entertain an audience.</p>
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Two notable trends emerge from this analysis. First, Jocelyn selects images with a casual, relaxed, and even peaceful feeling, in contrast to the high-energy, intensely stylized, posed photos of State University (see Connection and Individuality). Because emotions “move, stick, and slide” (Ahmed 14), we can link these images to Jocelyn’s comments that she wanted to use photos “where you can really see the love and sisterhood” in contrast to the images of State University’s women who look like “they work hard to be pretty.” The relaxation of these images, I would speculate, connects to Jocelyn’s rejection of the “work” that goes into “being pretty.” Instead of putting effort into your appearance, Jocelyn’s video argues, you’ll put effort into involvement—as demonstrated by the fundraising total image. Despite Jocelyn’s claim that she wants images that are “goofy and light,” (a feeling she achieves with the images coded “fun”) she actually shows *seriousness* in the involvement photo and the individuality photos, whereas these images in State University photos are characterized by silliness. For the involvement photo, we connected this seriousness to Jocelyn’s comment that when she and Frieda watched the video, they wanted to “go and do something good,” noting that the video should motivate members to take action for a serious cause. The seriousness of the individuality photo may come from the emotions involved in many women’s entry narratives into the sorority—their anxiety that they would lose their identities to the identity of a “sorority girl.” The peaceful individual photo makes the argument that a woman entering the sorority retains a calm, centered self in the midst of the group affinity.

We next hypothesized from my two interviews with Jocelyn that she would include more images of fun and connection and fewer images of beauty when compared to the State University. Because Jocelyn’s video had a higher number of images (132) than State University’s (101), we converted the number of times an image was used to a percentage of their usage in the overall video to compare them. Table 2 demonstrates how much of each video was comprised of images of each code.

Table 2. Percentage of Each Video Using Images from Each Code.



While Jocelyn's video is made up of 7% more images of "fun" than the State University video, she actually includes 5% *fewer* images of individuality, 10% fewer images of involvement, and 6% *more* images of beauty. Carolyn and I suspected that this was because "beauty" became a kind of "catch-all" category for images that didn't really seem to serve any other purpose. The "beauty" code did not necessarily mean that the women were elaborately or diligently beautiful, only that they were mostly just standing and smiling at the camera. Had they been in a special location or participating in an activity, we could have coded these images as "fun" or "involvement." Looking at the images, Carolyn and I could, to a certain extent, pick out the degree to which women had expended effort toward being beautiful (e.g. the State University women seemed to put more work into styling long hair). We were not able to translate these fine degrees into a coding scheme that another coder who was unfamiliar with the images could follow. After coding for the primary function of the image, we thought we could add a second code for the secondary function of the image. For example, in the State University photo coded "fun" in Table 1, we could add a secondary code for "beauty." We thought this might demonstrate our hypothesis that almost all the State University photos had the secondary purpose of "beauty." However, we found that where one photo would be coded as beauty and then second coded as fun, another image would be coded as fun and then second coded as beauty, meaning that we saw no significant difference in the overall percentages. We did think that visually, Jocelyn's images of "beauty" felt more relaxed than State University's images of beauty, a distinction I attempted to show in Table 1.

As Jocelyn noted in her interview, these "beauty" photos likely ended up in the video because they were what Jocelyn had to work with in the first place, and she was working under a deadline and learning all new technology in a short amount of time. The women probably sent the beauty photos to Jocelyn because they felt that they looked best in the "beauty" images, which are posed, staged, and often re-taken until everyone in the photo feels that they look good. To her credit, Jocelyn sent out three emails while she was composing the video, asking women to send in more photos of service and philanthropic events (photos that would have increased the percentage of "fun" and "involvement"). At the time of this writing, in the fall of 2014, Jocelyn is putting together the recruitment video for January 2015 and has already sent out two emails asking women to send in more photos from service and philanthropic events. These emails suggest both that she is emboldened in her shaping of the genre for next year, and that she too wants fewer images only showcasing the beauty of the women.

Nonetheless, I suspect Jocelyn would be surprised at the how much she did, in fact, replicate the original video (I know Carolyn and I were surprised). What seems to have occurred fits into the concept of "enculturation," which

critiques the idea that learning discipline is a one-way transmission of knowledge that imposes the values of a discipline on a learner. Instead, enculturation entails “remaking the person with a disciplined identity, remaking the discipline as it engages new participants, and remaking society through these processes” (30). While Jocelyn was “remaking” the sorority video in a way that felt emotionally appropriate to her, the sorority video was “remaking” her and her friends into sorority women.

Conclusion: Emotion as “Settling In” to Genre

Because Carolyn Miller drew attention to genre as a means of both constructing and responding to social situations, scholars in rhetorical genre studies (RGS) took a particular interest in how writers *modify* written genres across social spaces, sometimes called “re-purposing” (Prior and Shipka; Roozen), “recontextualization” (Berkenkotter), or “bricolage” (Nowacek). In studying genres in this way, scholars examine how writers combine their previous genre experience with present rhetorical challenges and imagined rhetorical futures (Roozen 320). I believe it would be an overstatement to name Jocelyn’s video an act of “repurposing,” “recontextualization,” or “bricolage” because she retained many of the rhetorical purposes of sorority recruitment videos as a genre. Because this was Jocelyn’s first video, and because she was still “settling in” to her role as director of recruitment and the genres entailed in that role, it makes sense that a dramatic re-purposing of the video wouldn’t “feel” comfortable for her. I see this research as more useful for recognizing how *accumulated emotions* are one way of “engaging” with texts across contexts, and how these emotions form an important part of writers’ history with texts. As Kevin Roozen writes, “the practices and processes employed in the invention and production of semiotic texts are not solely a product of a particular disciplinary setting, but rather from multiple engagements with texts” (320). Jocelyn takes up the genre of the recruitment video with various emotions regarding what sororities were—exclusive groups where women had to put serious effort into their appearance—and is able to strategically insert emotions of comfort and silliness to suggest to her audience that her sorority is a place where members can relax and be themselves. Jocelyn did not change the overall rhetorical functions of the video, but she did change the means by which they achieved those functions, using images that emotionally resonated for her and her group members.

As J. Michael Rifenburg argues, despite well-publicized calls to appreciate different forms of multimodality in the composition classroom, there is a bias against the body as a mode of argument “in and especially *for* composing.” I want to expand on the metaphor of “settling in” to genre as a means of explaining the embodied, emotional experience for writers taking up new genres. If, for example, I move into a new space, such as a home or office, I am going to try to “settle in” there. I will modify my surroundings not just by putting my possessions there, but by trying out different ways of arranging furniture, painting the walls, hanging décor, and organizing closets and drawers—to see what makes me feel comfortable and at home. If I am moving in with other people, I will use their feedback as well to create the feeling that we are “settled in.” We want students to feel “at home” in genres of academic and workplace writing, but these spaces can feel more like dorm rooms or rental properties, with no emotional investment in long-term “settling in.” As such, they are comparable to what Elizabeth Wardle calls “mutt genres,” or “genres that do not respond to rhetorical situations requiring communication in order to accomplish a purpose that is meaningful to the author” (777). Wardle finds that students rarely see the function of a writing assignment outside of getting a good grade in composition (777), just as a student may not see the purpose of a dorm room beyond sleep and socializing. While students don’t need to be homeowners of every genre, it might make sense to think about them as *potential* homeowners, asking them to think about how they might feel were they to permanently inhabit the space. As Russell writes, “learning to read or write a new genre can be—if one sees genre in its breadth and depth—a way of imagining a different way of being in the world” (Kind-ness 240), just as touring a new home or office stimulates our imagination as to how we might exist in the space.

A genre pedagogy that includes emotion, then, makes way for an embodied pedagogy of writing. In “settling in,” the writer uses her body and her emotions as a way of making herself at home in a new genre. Jocelyn selects photos that feel emotionally authentic to her and her group, even if their purposes weren’t radically different from the model text. Because “emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies” (Ahmed 4), emotions serve as a kind of embodied feedback to the writer concerning how a genre does and does not feel comfortable for her. Pedagogically, this suggests that we pay attention to how and why students are “settling in” to some genres and not others, asking them to articulate why some genres feel comfortable and others less so, and connecting these emotions to past histories and contacts with these genres.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol for Jocelyn

1. Do you have experience in making videos?
2. What program did you use?
3. What did you think the purpose of the video should be?
4. Tell me about your process of creating this video.
5. Did you use any examples in making the video?
6. Tell me about how you selected the photos for the video.
7. Tell me about how you picked the song for the video.
8. Tell me about the organization of the video.
9. Did you get feedback on the video while you were making it?
10. Did you get feedback on the finished product?
11. Did you make changes based on this feedback?
12. Do you feel the video was successful?

([Return to text.](#))

Notes

1. "Take up" and "uptake" hold varied meanings in the literature on genre. In this essay, I use the phrase "take up" to refer to the way a writer *approaches* a genre, particularly her thoughts and feelings as she considers her own intervention in that genre. By "take up," I do not mean Anne Freadman's notion of "uptake," which refers more specifically to the social action of genres to mediate between past and future actions. ([Return to text.](#))
2. There is some slippage between the terms "affect" and "emotion." For the purposes of this essay, I will use "emotion" to refer to feelings narrativized and "shaped through specific cultural, social, and political contexts," and "affect" to refer to the actual physical, embodied experience of feeling (Edbauer 201). ([Return to text.](#))
3. All names and the name of the sorority have been changed. ([Return to text.](#))
4. To be clear, Prior and Bilbro use "enculturation" to refer to learning in academic disciplines. They do suggest, however, that a promising direction of research into enculturation is the "social and personal trajectories that students and professionals trace through multiple worlds" (27). ([Return to text.](#))
5. It is not my intention to cast the historical rooting of the sorority in a negative light. Most of my research participants were proud and grateful to be a part of a longstanding tradition of college women and appreciated the help from the national chapter. I stress the rooting of the sorority here so as to fully articulate the challenges faced by writers approaching the sorority's genres. ([Return to text.](#))

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